

What is God like in the Bible?

Background information

Sort the information below to connect with each of the texts in Resource 3.1. Some may apply to more than one.

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| <p>Anthropologists look at the idea of holiness in terms of purity and danger. Humans are sinful and so cannot be in the holy presence of God – God’s holiness is too pure to be defiled. Sacrifice is one way to cleanse a person so that they can come close to God. A ritual is not enough, however, and people who offend the holiness of God sometimes meet a dramatic fate (e.g. Uzzah, who touched the Ark of God, see 1 Samuel 7).</p> | <p>Moses is the key figure in the first five books of the Bible. He is the founder of Israel’s religion, the giver of the Law (Torah), and a charismatic leader.</p> | <p>The letter from John was probably by the same writer as the Gospel, although this is not certain. It looks like the people John is writing to are under attack from some false teachers saying that Jesus is not God incarnate.</p> |
| <p>For Jews and Christians, the book of Exodus presents evidence of God’s ongoing concern with the People of God, as part of a salvation narrative. God wants to rescue his people, and acts to do so.</p> | <p>Mount Horeb (or Sinai) was a place of encounter with God for Moses (in fire in Exodus 3, and in a violent storm in Exodus 19:16–19). Elijah is being presented as a kind of second Moses, but God is encountered in a whisper.</p> | <p>The message John gives is that the great Creator God is still concerned with individual people – he loves everyone. The evidence for this is that God gave Jesus as a sacrifice to save all people. Followers of Jesus should demonstrate the same sacrificial love of others.</p> |
| <p>In biblical times, a person’s name was bound up with their true identity. God reveals his name to Moses three times (<i>I Am ...</i>). Many translations use ‘the LORD’ (in capital letters) to indicate the Hebrew word <i>YHWH</i>, often pronounced ‘YAHWEH’ – the divine name for God revealed to Moses here as ‘I Am Who I Am’. Many Jews will not say this word, out of reverence for G-d.</p> | <p>The final chapters of the book of 1 Kings tells the conflict between the prophet Elijah and Ahab, king of Israel around 850 BCE. There is a showdown where Elijah challenges Ahab, who has led Israel astray by worshipping the local god Baal. Elijah’s God (YHWH) ‘defeats’ Baal, and Elijah flees from Ahab’s anger.</p> | <p>The numerous gods of the polytheist nations surrounding Israel were capricious and unreliable. The Bible presents the God of Israel as constant and trustworthy.</p> |
| <p>John’s Gospel was possibly written by one of Jesus’ disciples, John son of Zebedee, an eyewitness to Jesus’ life and death. Not all theologians agree with this. It is quite different in style from the other three Gospels. It was probably written later, and John seems to have been reflecting on the significance of Jesus’ life and teachings.</p> | <p>The Greek term ‘Logos’ or ‘Word’ is applied to Jesus. It suggests that Jesus is the ‘Word’ and existed before the creation of the world. Jesus ‘became flesh’ – the incarnation – and shows the glory of God. John’s teaching is: look at Jesus – see God.</p> | <p>Theologians suggest that to say ‘God is love’ is not to say that God merely acts in a loving manner. Love is not just a way that God behaves sometimes – it is the very essence of God. As God is Trinity, Christians argue, there is a dynamic relationship of love at the heart of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit love each other.</p> |